

Book Review: Reid, S. and Valasik, M., *Alt-Right Gangs: A Hazy Shade of White*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 2020. ISBN: 978-0520300453 (Paperback). 191 Pages. \$29.95.

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In the book, *Alt-Right Gangs: A Hazy Shade of White*, authors Shannon E. Reid and Matthew Valasik begin by advocating for alternative rights gangs to be included in research about street gang activity. Reid and Valasik explain the extent of youth activity in the White Power Movement (WPM). For years, white youth participating in white power movement activities have been excluded from research (Reid and Valasik, 2020). This book aims to provide researchers, scholars, and criminal justice practitioners a great insight into the structure of these alt-right gangs to push for their inclusion in future research (Reid and Valasik, 2020). According to our authors, these youth have been excluded from research because no precise definition defines this group (Reid and Valasik, 2020). These youth have been misclassified when being compared to traditional street gangs. Several definitions have been provided that do not adequately describe these youth. Reid and Valasik then discuss the myths and their merit surrounding alt-right gangs (Reid

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and Valasik, 2020). It is essential to increase research and decrease the reliance on myths because myths are not always accurate. Constantly relying on inaccurate myths will further discourage the correct law enforcement practices to deter youth from participating in alt-right gangs. The authors then transition to discuss the risk factors for those that join alt-right gangs. Males and females have different risk factors and often assume different roles in these gangs (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Usual risk factors for gang involvement are youth from more poverty-stricken areas or youth who grow up in unstable households. Next, Reid and Valasik discuss white power clothing brands and music used to recruit youth (Reid and Valasik, 2020). The clothing and music are used as symbols to try to avoid law enforcement detection. The clothing brands are used for identification purposes.

Our authors then discuss the use of free space and identifying common areas where these gang members loiter. These free spaces allow these youth to be comfortable around each other while trying their best to dodge law enforcement attention. These gang members protect their territory physically and virtually pertaining to the use of online recruitment. Our authors further discuss recruitment via the internet and social media. Social media and the internet are enormous platforms for recruitment. The internet allows these youth to connect and recruit worldwide. Alt-right gangs use memes to spread ideologies as well. Memes are used to mask their core beliefs and avoid detection from law enforcement. Next, the authors discuss the typical criminal activities that alt-right gang members participate in. It is interesting to note that these gang members are involved in a large variety of offenses often referred to as “cafeteria-style offending” (Reid and Valasik, 2020). There is no pattern for the types of crimes committed by these gang members. Finally, Reid and Valasik discuss the need for additional research into youth involvement in alt-right gangs (Reid and Valasik, 2020). There needs to be more effort to intervene with youth to possibly deter them from joining these gangs. While our authors discuss many vital points, the main takeaways to discuss further are internet websites, memes, and white power music all used for recruitment and to spread ideologies.

In today’s society, the internet is a vital source of communication. While people can communicate positive messages and stay in contact with each other for the good, unfortunately, people can also spread white supremacist ideas to recruit people worldwide (Reid and Valasik, 2020). What makes the internet so powerful is the idea that people can surf the web and participate in these hateful message boards often without the fear of detection from law enforcement (Holt, Freilich, and Chermak,

2017). The internet is essential to recruit members and maintain solidarity since people are not always able to be in the physical presence of another. Solidarity is the strengthening of a group towards a common goal (Holt, Freilich, and Chermak, 2017). This is why these alt-right gangs have been able to grow consistently. For example, the Proud Boys men's club was founded by Gavin McInnes. The Proud Boys often relied on the internet and message boards to increase solidarity and cohesiveness while spreading their ideas (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Social media is a very prominent way to spread ideologies. These social media platforms are considered free spaces. The gang members can potentially upload any information they want to recruit people. However, it is important to note that members use a certain "code" for communication to avoid law enforcement detection. Several well-known websites have been created to continuously spread radical messages.

One website that was created was Liberty.net. Louis Beam created Liberty.net, and that website made him one of the first alt-right gang members to look into digital communication to spread these ideologies (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Another website that is known for spreading white power movement ideologies is called Stormfront. Stormfront launched in the late 1900s and is the most prominent website for white power members (Reid and Valasik, 2020). There are many threads exposed on Stormfront about radical and hateful messages. The websites are also important for networking purposes. People use these websites to speak freely and away from the scrutiny of others that disagree with their ideas. These websites create a sense of uniformity for those involved. A critical point about using the internet to recruit starts with people being interested in radicalization. Radicalization has several different phases. The first phase is the "searching phase," where a person is interested in learning more about the radical group, so he or she searches the internet for more information (Wong, Frank, and Allsup, 2015). The "seduction phase" exposes individuals directly to ideologies by finding sites that specifically express radical antics (Wong, Frank, and Allsup, 2015). The "captivation phase" is where the viewer expresses interest in the ideologies presented (Wong, Frank, and Allsup, 2015). The "persuasion phase" is where the individual decides to join the group presenting the ideologies and engage with other members via message boards, blogs, etc. (Wong, Frank, and Allsup, 2015). These different phases are crucial for the recruitment process and explain the steps many individuals go through before joining a group digitally. Authors Reid and Valasik do a great job going into extensive detail regarding the recruitment process via the internet. In addition, there are many examples to help the reader

understand how the internet is used to express ideologies. While internet websites are important to spread radical messages, memes are also vital for alt-right gang recruitment and propaganda.

For alt-right gang members, memes are used to camouflage hateful messages that may often look funny or infiltrated with humor; however, the memes always advocate for the alt-right gang's core beliefs. This can be seen as a pitch. Most people may see a meme as funny; however, as time progresses, the viewer begins to see the originator's ultimate plan. The memes draw people's attention to the possible joke or sarcasm without the initial real idea behind the meme being initially exploited (Pollard, 2018). While many social media sites are explored in criminological research, the most prominent social media site that spreads these ideologies is Twitter. It is important to mention that memes are posted to social media sites, so it is imperative to expound on the use of social media sites as it relates to the use of memes. Being able to tweet gives people the opportunity to express themselves in real-time. Even the Proud Boys founder used Twitter to spread ideologies (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Former President Donald Trump has used Twitter in a way that many would even assume that he would advocate for the alt-right gang and white supremacist activities. Throughout Trump's campaign, memes were used to express dominancy and "Make America Great Again." Many memes often showed either himself or his wife looking more well-groomed and more professional than a democratic party representative. For example, there is a meme with Michelle Obama ungroomed and dirty while Melania Trump looks groomed and professional (Pollard, 2018). Some depicted that meme as a racist meme expressing that whites dominated the African American community.

Memes are usually created to present the idea of white supremacy, explaining that only the white race should be the face of the future. They advocate for white nationalism and are against any group or ethnicity that would hinder their progress. This would explain why white supremacy groups are against immigration because that threatens their power to be the dominant culture. Another prominent meme is the Pepe and the Frog. This meme has been said to have been used to promote alt-right politics from Donald Trump's administration during his presidency. While the meme was initially harmless, as attention to it progressed and was seen on different websites, it developed into being known as a meme in favor of Nazi ideologies. When the meme was spread by Donald Trump, that only showed others that Trump might support white supremacy ideologies through his social media. The meme's attention continued to grow, and so did alt-right gang recruitment (Nagel, 2020).

In our book, the use of memes is well explained. Examples of memes with explanations are provided in the book so the reader can visualize the manipulation behind the memes instead of the reader just reading about a meme and drawing their own conclusions. The memes shown in the book correlate with the same known beliefs of the alt-right gangs. While memes to spread ideologies are important, white power music has also been a way to influence and recruit.

White power music is any music that advocates or promotes the idea of white nationalism while often indicating racially suggestive ideas. White power music has spread white supremacy ideas and recruited others to participate in white power movements (Katz, 2020). Music is used as a form of expression and to provide messages to listeners. White power music would have a different message than rap or hip-hop music. Typically, white power music is usually heavy metal or rock music. Music expresses a behavior and elaborates on social norms established by the band or group presenting the music (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Music is very significant because it allows songwriters and bands to bypass legal issues of hate speech. Many message boards on the Stormfront website have many pages to discuss white power music (Reid and Valasik, 2020). Although music as a tool to spread ideologies is very prevalent, it is important to mention that certain music companies and platforms have not allowed white power advocacy groups to spread music on their sites (Reid and Valasik, 2020).

Despite this obstacle, white power music is still able to spread across the world. One of the more prominent sources of white power music is punk rock music, specifically referring to Rock Against Communism (RAC), a form of white power music that has been around since the 1970s. RAC has been known throughout the years as a primary scene for a white power movement environment. Essentially, white supremacists feel that through immigration and other laws, they are “losing their ground” to being the dominant culture. Those who support these ideologies feel that their race is being attacked, so many people fall into white power music to not feel alienated in society and feel a sense of inclusion. This inclusion still allows them to spread hateful ideas and messages (Grosholz and Pieri, 2020). These music scenes allow those with similar views to gather together without controversial opinions and without fear of judgment from any “outsider” that may be against their beliefs. A very important study of white power music was done by authors Grosholz and Pieri. These authors researched hundreds of songs with white power undertones and analyzed them to detect and depict different themes and what the music seems to be advocating for. The

songs reveal many core beliefs of radical ideologies. One of the main themes seen is the desecration of society (Grosholz and Pieri, 2020). Desecration of society is where white supremacists believe that their culture is being attacked. In our book, the authors elaborate on what white power music is; however, the argument could have been improved with specific instances where the music directly recruited an individual to an alt-right gang. This could have been done by interviewing a person and documenting their perception of white power music to show a strong point in recruitment. A lot of information surrounds what the music is; however, it fails to provide specific recruitment examples through white power music.

In conclusion, our authors do a great job explaining what alt-right gangs are, how they thrive, and how they operate. This information is well documented in the book. Many excellent examples are used referring to prominent alt-right gangs and detailing various recruitment strategies. The use of internet websites is a very prominent way to recruit as well as the use of memes to disguise alt-right gang core beliefs. White power music is also a great way to spread ideologies, especially amongst the youth in this generation. This book contributes to the understanding of gangs and advocates for the inclusion of alt-right gangs as a part of future gang research, even if they are not identical to a conventional gang. The information in this book is an excellent source for researchers, criminal justice practitioners, and law enforcement to identify alt-right gang activity for youth to deter future recruitment. Great examples are provided; however, this book is not without its weak point relating to the argument behind white power music recruitment. Reid and Valasik fail to provide specific examples of people that were recruited because of white power music. Even with this limitation, this book is a great source to learn about alt-right gangs that researchers can expound upon in the future.

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